Why the *PISC TC3 Standards* must begin with defining kava

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PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM

PISC Technical Committee 3 (TC 3): Kava Standards

2. BACKGROUND

The Pacific region has expressed a strong and coordinated interest in the development of [illegible] and Standards Australia—Tan from 16 November 2023 to 19 December 2023 and generated nearly 30 submissions from government agencies, academic institutions, private-sector organisations, and technical experts across the Pacific. This level of engagement reflects the cultural significance of Kava, its economic importance to exporting countries, and the need for consistent, evidence-based standards to support regional and international market access.

Before we can develop meaningful Standards, we must answer a foundational question:

What is kava, and who has the authority to define it?

Committee Terms of Reference

Committee Title	Pacific Regional Kava Standards Committee
Sector	Kava Sector

Background

[illegible] quality, protect the region's reputation, and support market access and premium pricing. These standards also lay the groundwork for a future Geographical Indicator (GI), a key goal of the Pacific Regional Kava Development Strategy. The Pacific Islands Standards Committee (PISC), formed in 2022 under the Pacific Islands Forum, leads this effort through its Technical Committee 3 (TC3 Kava), coordinating regional

Objectives of the Committee

- To develop and maintain harmonised Pacific Regional Kava Standards that safeguard authenticity, ensure quality and safety across the value chain, and support market access.
- Adopt Common Definitions, including agreed definition for "noble kava" chemotype, defects, and grade classes in a shared glossary. Agree on harmonised uniform terminology for colour, moisture, ash, and filth

Inclusions and Exclusions to Scope

Included:

- Kava Food and Food Products including:
  - Traditional beverages prepared from dried root, soaked and strained;
  - Dietary supplements including concentrated extracts standardised for kavalactone content;
  - Instant mixes & teas including powdered or bagged food products for convenience of use; and
  - Pharmaceutical, Neutraceutical and other non food or non-beverage uses of Kava.

Excluded:

- Clinical health standards or guidelines related to kava usage.

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Tongan Princess Angelika Lātūfuipeka Tuku'aho on the Regional Kava Development Strategy

Kava is not just a plant or drink; it's a cultural system

- The *lifeblood of culture*, a *sacrament*, a relational 'conduit', *ingestible manifestation of land, culture and people*
- Kava, sika, sakau, maloku, yaqona, 'ava, 'awa .. is **noun and verb**: incl. *Piper methysticum* (plant and prepared drink), protocols, talanoa-vā, and vakaturaga, faka'apa'apa, fa'asamoa, pono etc…
- Kava is a *cultural keystone species* - medicine, practice, ceremony…

Fiji Government's Post
Fiji Government
January 29 ·
KAVA POLICY & KAVA BILL CONSULTATION
"Your Voice Shapes the Future of Fiji's Kava Industry"
The Ministry of Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry, in collaboration with the office of the Solicitor General, will be conducting a nationwide public consultation to gather feedback from all stakeholders in Fiji's kava industry – from farmers and exporters to processors, consumers, and cultural practitioners. This ensures the final Kava Policy and Kava Bill truly reflect the needs and aspirations of those who depend on this vital industry.
Why your input matters: Kava is not just a crop; it's part of our culture, livelihood, and national economy. Your experiences and insights will help create practical, effective regulations that support growth while preserving tradition.

The sole authority to define kava rests with Pacific peoples and their knowledge systems. That authority is supported by UNDRIP, WIPO, Nagoya Protocol etc.

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CODEX ALIMENTARIUS

INTERNATIONAL FOOD STANDARDS

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

World Health Organization

E-mail: codex@fao.org - www.codexalimentarius.org

REGIONAL STANDARD FOR KAVA PRODUCTS FOR USE AS A BEVERAGE WHEN MIXED WITH WATER

North America and South West Pacific

CXS 336R-2020

Adopted in 2020. Amended in 2023.

1. SCOPE

This standard applies to fresh or dried kava products that are used to prepare a beverage when mixed with potable water, intended for human consumption, in conformity with the description in Section 2 of this standard. The standard does not apply to the final kava beverage as such, or kava products used for medicinal purposes, or as ingredients in foods or other tradable product, or for any other purposes.

2. DESCRIPTION

Kava products are derived from selected parts of the Noble cultivar of the kava plant, *Piper methysticum* G. Forst. in the family Piperaceae. The parts of the kava plant used to produce kava products may include:

a) peeled, fresh and/or dried rhizomes, basal stems (up to the first node on each kava branch); and

b) fresh and/or dried roots.

Upper stems, leaves, peelings (bark), and extraction residues are excluded.

2.1 Fresh kava products

Fresh kava products are prepared using peeled rhizomes, peeled basal stems and/or roots.

2.2 Dried kava products

Dried kava products may be in the form of intact lateral roots or peeled rhizomes, or peeled chips, or in powdered form.

3. ESSENTIAL COMPOSITION AND QUALITY FACTORS

3.1 Raw materials

Kava plants used as raw material for kava products shall be a Noble variety. The Noble variety shall be confirmed using their morphological characteristics. Kava of the wild, *Piper wichmannii* and Two-day (Tudei) varieties are excluded.

The following list is non-exhaustive and includes examples of vernacular terms used to describe some Noble varieties in the various regions:

i. Federated States of Micronesia: *Rahmwahnger;*

ii. Fiji: *Damu, Dokobana loa, Dokobana vula, Yonolulu, Loa kasa balavu, Loa kasa loka, Matakaro balavu*

value-added products /

products containing Piper methysticum

are **not** kava

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KAVA

≠

'products containing *Piper methysticum*' (or alternative <u>not</u> including word *kava*)

Why definition / distinction matters for Standards

- If we do not clearly define kava, we cannot regulate it effectively
- Kava ≠ 'products containing *Piper methysticum*' - no resemblance to kava as defined by traditional knowledge, 'cultural significance' or evidence-based standards.
- Kava:
  - low risk (WHO etc.)
- Extracts and commodified products can be:
  - highly concentrated, chemically altered, can include dangerous additives, have greater risk potential including liver toxicity

Commodification's marketed as kava create a dangerous category error by giving customers the impression 'products containing *Piper methysticum*' are inherently safe.

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KAVA

≠

'products containing *Piper methysticum*'
(or alternative <u>not</u> including word *kava*)

Reasons for a clear distinction between kava and 'products…'

1. Improved safety
2. Education, information accuracy and countering misinformation
3. Contributes to research integrity / evidence-based standards
4. Regulatory and product description accuracy (consumer laws)
5. The '*slippery slope*' – kava as a front for dangerous additives

"The situation worsens when … [operators] mix kava with substances like kratom… Such products should adopt alternative brand names to avoid misleading consumers and prevent another global ban on kava trade."

(Tekon Tumukon, Biosecurity Director, Government of Vanuatu)

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The Core Principle: Standards must begin with definition

Definition: clear, culturally grounded, and evidence-based.

Because:

- *What we define determines what we regulate*
- *What we name determines what we protect*
- *What we fail to distinguish becomes vulnerable to misuse*
- *And what we get right enables everything else*

Definition is essential to "evidence-based … Kava Standards that safeguard authenticity, ensure quality and safety … "

'Products' are not the future of kava; they are its greatest risk.

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Kava: a cultural system (more than a plant and/or drink)

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Addiction from kratom – 'kava bar' patrons and pop-culture 'kava' beverage consumers

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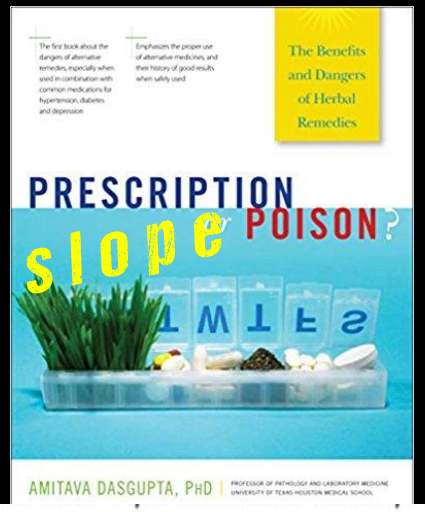

However, now it is well established that long-term use of kava may cause severe liver toxicity and even death. It is interesting that the South Pacific

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